

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system to couple tunnel servers to tunnel clients executing host applications for use in a virtual private network (VPN) environment, comprising:
 - 5 (a) a receiver that receives requests from host applications executing on the tunnel clients, the requests addressed to the tunnel coupling system to establish a VPN tunnel;
 - (b) a processor that processes the requests and an indication of loads on the tunnel servers to establish the VPN tunnels by designating at least one of the tunnel servers to each requested tunnel; and
 - 10 (c) a tunnel traffic distributor that distributes tunnel traffic to the tunnel servers based at least part on the designations.
2. The system of claim 1, and further comprising:
 - (a) an evaluation processor that evaluates the tunnel traffic before the tunnel traffic distributor distributes the tunnel traffic to the tunnel servers.
- 15 3. The system of claim 2, wherein the evaluation performed by the evaluation processor includes at least performing security functions on the tunnel traffic.
4. The system of claim 1, wherein:
 - (a) the request processor establishes the VPN tunnel by, in part, associating each VPN tunnel with characteristics of tunnel traffic for that VPN tunnel; and
 - (b) the tunnel traffic distributor operates in part based on the associations, without involvement of the host applications.